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ABSTRACT

A well-chosen example can lend life to learning in a way that few other resources available to the teacher can rival; the driving force behind the current educational reforms is learning by example. The Bush Administration, to meet the challenge of the nation's education deficit, will become pupils of the educational system to learn from the valuable experience of teachers. It is the Administration's expectation that (1) everyone in America be educated to their fullest potential, a situation that can only result when all students remain in school and the term "dropout" becomes obsolete; (2) access to education must be ensured for not only the academically talented, but also for those living in poverty, the at-risk students, and the handicapped; and (3) all American citizens must be held accountable to the nation relative to the quality of education the country provides. The establishment of merit school programs using state standards under federal guidance would provide both official recognition and financial support to schools that are accountable and effective. Education is a critical part of the American social fabric; in a real sense, it is the vital link between our personal goals in life and our common goals as a free nation. (KM)

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U.S. SECRETARY OF EDUCATION

EDUCATION: THE FUTURE BEGINS TODAY

REMARKS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY
BEFORE THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION FORUM

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National Museum of Women in the Arts
Washington, D.C.

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Distinguished Governors, honored guests, and fellow teachers, it is an honor to welcome you to "A Teacher's Inaugural Experience." It is not only symbolic that the first official inaugural event for President-elect George Bush is an education one; but it also signals the solid commitment he has when he says he intends to be the Education President. And what better way to send the signal than in the distinguished company of some of the finest educators in America. What could be better than to begin the future today with nearly 250 of America's outstanding classroom teachers, men and women who are on the front line in educating our most precious resource, our children?

President-elect Bush and I are exceptionally proud that each of you has agreed to join us. Your presence here is a great tribute to the new President. As a loyal servant of both President Reagan and President-elect Bush, I am honored to accept some small share of that tribute on behalf of both the Reagan and the Bush Administrations. I thank you.

An Inauguration is not only a new beginning, but also a time for taking stock of how far we have come in order that we can understand the unfinished business that lies ahead. As the poet T.S. Eliot once observed, in our end we also find our beginning, and nothing could be truer when it comes to

education. Where we start in this process will determine just how well we do in the future. That is why George Bush, during his presidential campaign, laid out in detail his future plans for education in a document called "Invest In Our Children." As the President-elect has said, "Our children are our future. The way we treat our children reflects our values as a nation and as a people.... Children embody our respect for ourselves and for our future." And that is precisely why President-elect Bush pledged to lead a national commitment to make this investment in our children.

I hope to expand on what the President-elect's commitment to be "the education President" means to America, and to the education community at large. The fact is that the Secretary of Education is the President's chief advocate for education policy, and I will be active both in presenting the President-elect's policies to you and in sharing your concerns with him. This President will have hands-on involvement with education policy every step of the way, and I will be here to counsel, guide, and especially to carry out his policies. We both will need and very much welcome your help.

I don't have to tell you how important and how challenging your work is: you see it every day, inside and outside the classroom. You know how fragile a young mind is and at the

same time how precious a resource it is. This country's future -- its economic, political, and moral well being -- are quite literally in your hands. Your work will determine our strength, our resourcefulness, and the quality of our future leaders. Your work -- the nurturing of young minds -- will shape tomorrow's parents, leaders, workers, and, yes, its Presidents.

Learning by Example

I think those of us who have been in the teaching profession know that teaching by example is perhaps the best way of communicating to students. Whether it is a hands-on demonstration of a scientific principle, an eyewitness account of an historical event, or showing how mathematics can solve a simple everyday problem, a well-chosen example can give life to learning in a way that few other resources available to the teacher can rival. In fact, to me this is what the sweeping education reform movement is all about: learning by example.

The difference in this case is that while you, the hands-on educators, are providing the examples based on your experience of what succeeds, your pupils are public officials at all levels. These officials truly care about the quality of education our system produces. They expect our schools to

graduate students ready to be productive members of a free society. These officials that you teach are ready to respond to the concerns of parents, teachers, students, and civic leaders about the tragic losses that result when our schools fail in their mission.

We can and will learn from your examples -- examples of what succeeds in charging the student's imagination, of how to measure success in our schools, of how to set standards and meet them. We must learn from your experience, because the challenge to the American educational system is greater now than ever before. The national government cannot afford the illusion that it has all the answers, or that it can prescribe solutions for the many diverse and unique problems that arise in an ethnically diverse, pluralistic, free and open society. From your examples, we have already begun to grasp what works -- but it is the genius of our diverse Federal system that allows the various lessons you have to teach to be shared, modified, and adapted to the special situations that arise in every school district, every neighborhood, and every community across America. Common principles and commitments must inform the choices made in Harlem as well as Houston, but their application may vary widely throughout the land.

For that reason alone -- but for other sound reasons as well -- Federal leadership in education means using the considerable resources of the Federal government to share with the entire nation what we learn from your own successes and failures from day to day in teaching pupils and managing schools. The inspiration comes from you: the mandate to follow through is our responsibility. Now, I like to think that I am a fast learner -- and educators like yourselves have given me plenty of examples from which to learn.

The key directions for the Education Department during the next years were forged during my service in President Reagan's administration. The first months of my tenure as Secretary of Education served as a time for listening to the nation in terms of expectations of education and relating to America the problems it faced because of an education deficit.

I would characterize the Education Department under George Bush as dealing with three issues in terms of education. They can be summarized as expectations, access, and accountability. Let me expand on each of these points and indicate the specific techniques that we must develop in order to provide quality education.

Expectations. It is our expectation that every person in America be educated to his or her fullest potential. That will result only when all students stay in school, and this year's first graders go on to graduate in the year 2000. It is our expectation that the term "dropout" will become obsolete. There are many dropout programs in development throughout the United States and we must assist in implementation of these programs. We must place emphasis on early childhood development. It appears that the first few years of a child's life contribute immensely to their future academic success. Self-esteem and motivation are formed at this early stage and we must take advantage of these early years. We will extend the early childhood programs we have and develop others with the states.

It is our expectation that every person in this nation be literate. Today, twenty-seven million Americans are functionally illiterate. There are specific programs that have been developed and proposed by educators and business people. We must seek the implementation of these programs.

Further, it is not unrealistic to expect that all handicapped people be educated for maximum independence. We already have the programs in place and we need to see that there is joint effort between the national and state levels to implement these programs.

We should expect that all academic programs be of excellence. In order to achieve this, we must have the participation of every citizen in the debate about quality education -- parents, teachers, federal and state officials, school administrators and others must enter the discussions and find ways of strengthening education in America. Education and its quality should seek a national consensus. The Department of Education will assist in development of this consensus and will fund research and development programs that further the national goal in education. We will work with the states to implement quality educational programs. Americans can expect no less than the finest education for all of its citizens.

Access. Every student should have access to a quality education. We must assure access for not only the academically talented majority and minority students, but for those living in poverty, the at-risk students and the handicapped. I have mentioned early childhood intervention. We need to develop significant programs that result in education of children. We must combine them with day care. In other words, there should be access for all children to these programs which can prevent future dropouts. We know what works, and we will be seeking ways of working with the states to start or to extend these programs.

In terms of access, parents should be involved in selecting the school of their choice. Now, the word "choice" means many different things to different people. But as both President Reagan and President-elect Bush have observed, choice works. Some may disagree on the best way to give parents more options to choose from, and on how choice programs can be used to build better schools. But the jury is already in on this one: choice will be a critical element in education reform for years to come. Indeed, it may prove to be the linchpin in our common efforts to ensure that all Americans -- black and white, rich and poor, Asian and Native Americans, Hispanics, and the handicapped -- have access to a quality education. We expect students to compete with one another in academics and athletics because we believe that competition produces better results for everyone. The same principle should be applied to schools themselves, and it has been applied with great success.

President-elect Bush has asked our Department to monitor and focus on State and local experiments with choice, and we will do that in the interest of achieving better public schools. Where appropriate, we will encourage innovative choice programs with financial incentives, such as awards to magnet schools and grant competitions under programs like the Fund for the Improvement and Reform of Schools and Teaching. Most of all, we will look for success stories and share them.

Choice is a powerful tool that can strengthen schools in trouble, not tear them down.

Accountability. All of us must be accountable to our nation relative to the quality of education we provide. Teachers must be accountable in terms of their professionalism. They must be knowledgeable and caring. They can be accountable by helping us develop -- together with the states -- certification and evaluation systems for our teachers. Further, we will expect teachers to be responsible and accountable for their educational programs, because we will urge that they participate in the decisions about the educational programs they teach.

Parents must be accountable by helping guide their children through the educational programs. They must raise their children's expectations and urge them to new educational heights.

Students must be held accountable for their motivation and commitment to a lifetime of learning. They must seek knowledge and have respect for themselves. They must know the dangers of drugs and alcohol and stay away from these substances.

George Bush has called for the establishment of a "Merit Schools" program to provide both official recognition and financial support to schools that are accountable and work, using standards defined by the States with some Federal guidance. At the Education Department we have been working closely with the Bush team to put the "Merit Schools" concept into concrete form. I believe we are far enough along on this plan to give you some idea of what we have in mind.

In our view, "merit schools" means schools that produce results. We don't need another theoretical model to tell us which schools are doing a good job; we just have to look at what they are actually producing. In judging merit, then, we expect the States will want to look at such results as test scores; college participation rates; successful employment of graduates; and, of critical importance, success in improving school participation and performance of the disadvantaged and the handicapped.

I want to help shape a Merit Schools program that places particular emphasis on reducing dropout rates. Dropouts are a tragic loss to our society, in both economic and human terms. By some estimates, the dropout problem is costing us over $240 billion annually -- a figure that's over ten times what we currently spend on education at the national level. Keeping

students in school must be a number one measure of success -- good schools give children the motivation to stick with it and succeed. Nothing could cap the success of the education reform movement like dramatic strides in reducing the number of dropouts.

I must stress that Merit Schools will be a cooperative program -- Federal, state, and local, as well as, I hope, the private sector. We are here to support, not to dictate, and we will do whatever we can to help States decide on the best ways to measure merit. But the kinds of criteria I have outlined are, I believe, indisputably among the chief goals of education reform. And without meaningful goals -- a real raising of expectations, accessibility, and accountability -- no program can succeed.

The Federal Share

I hope it is clear from what I have said, and from what the President-elect said earlier today, that the Federal role in education can be a lot stronger than people might imagine -- even without regard to the power of the Federal education budget. That budget, while it represents only 6 percent of the roughly $330 billion that we spend on education each year, is a powerful tool in support of American education, and an

invaluable means of leveraging other resources in aid of education.

We have some ideas about the Federal education budget as well, because I believe it is a resource that can be deployed with considerable skill, particularly if it is targeted on areas of urgent national need. I have already made a first step at reordering the Federal education budget. In President Reagan's last budget request, aimed at Fiscal Year 1990, we are seeking a level-funded budget that would redirect some spending, roughly $750 million, to assist the needy and the most disadvantaged in our education system. We asked, for example, for an increase of some $90 million in Chapter One concentration grants, money that goes to counties with the largest concentrations of children from poor families. President Reagan also requested an increase in funding for Pell Grants, a move which will also enable us to add some 135,000 less-than-full-time students to the program, many of whom attend our community colleges. Changes such as these -- doing more with what we have for the poor, the handicapped, the young people who most need help in reaching the first rung of the ladder of success -- must be a hallmark of our budget policy in education.

I know the President-elect agrees with these priorities, and that is why I am looking forward to working with him to fine-tune this last Reagan budget in order to reflect his incoming Administration's priorities, and to winning Congressional support for a truly progressive and targeted education budget. Your input, of course, is welcome -- we want a budget that has strong consensus support from not only schools, teachers and students, but, just as important, parents and the public at large. I have learned from experience, though, that you can't forge a consensus without first pointing out some directions in which you believe, leading the way, and winning some important followers. That, if I may say so without seeming immodest, is what the President-elect has tried to do today. It is a beginning that we believe has great promise, and with your counsel and support the achievement can be very great indeed.

- Besides the Federal budget, there's another important aspect of our role: getting out the word on where we're doing well and where we need to improve as a nation in education. Essentially, measuring accountability. For some years now we have been releasing a "Wall Chart on State Education Statistics." These statistics show trends and rankings in student performance as measured by factors such as graduation rates, exam scores, teacher salaries and other resources. The

sixth "Wall Chart" will be unveiled next month, and I hope President Bush will also be able to join me in sharing this information with the American people. Beginning this year, the Wall Chart will be the basis for a comprehensive annual report I will submit to the President on the State of Education in America.

We'll be getting out the word about our education successes as a nation as well as our shortcomings. You'll be hearing from me on numerous occasions, and I hope to have the opportunity to visit with many of you -- in your schools and with your students -- to learn what's on your mind. And, whenever they can fit it into their schedules, I'll be inviting President Bush and Vice President Quayle to join me as we seek ways to reduce our nation's education deficit.

A Personal Note

Let me close with a personal perspective on education in America as we prepare for the 1990's. Too often I fear we view education as an independent field of endeavor, with its own particular goals, methods, and interests. Nothing can be further from the truth. In America -- as in any free, democratic society -- education is a critical part of the social fabric, not really divisible from the things we care

most about in our lives: our families, our homes, our work, our neighborhoods. And, in a real sense, education is the critical link between our personal goals in life and our common goals as a free nation. For, as Thomas Jefferson said, "If a nation expects to be ignorant and free... it expects what never was and never will be."

There is another aspect I consider crucial in the development of young children, particularly in the early years when values and attitudes are firmly shaped, for good or ill. That is that no influence on young children is more powerful than the positive example of strong and caring parents. Nothing is more important than this. When we speak of education in America, we must not neglect the critical issue of strong moral support from family, neighborhood, community, and church in helping our children succeed. Parents, and teachers as well, must be free to inspire youngsters with proper moral and social values.

In terms of education, there is much that we can agree on, and much that we may wish to debate, honestly and openly. In both cases I welcome your thoughts and the benefit of your personal beliefs and experiences. Together we will find what works best to educate our young people, and together we will decide when more of the same just won't do -- and strike some

new ground. For what binds us together -- common educational goals for our children and our nation -- is surpassingly stronger than anything which divides us. Let us now make common cause, and help George Bush become the Education President to lead us toward the twenty-first century.